

Princeton N.J.



DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE AND REASONABLENESS OF FASTING, &c.

DELIVERED AT PRINCETON,

JANUARY 6, 1795.

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN the author was preparing the following discourse for the pulpit, he had no view of committing it to the press. Its structure would otherwise have suffered a material alteration. He does not now conceive himself at liberty to make the change. As there is nothing in the style and manner of the discourse different from what it is usual with him on the Sabbath, he imputes the request for its publication to an impulse of friendship; and his compliance is intended solely as a testimony of that friendship which subsists between him and those studious and ingenious youth whose pursuits in science he has so long had the pleasure to assist and direct. It cannot, he thinks, be ascribed, in him, to the vanity of attracting the publick attention. Vanity would have chosen a very different subject.

He remarks, in the last place, that there is nothing in the appointment of the Synod to observe a Fast, that can be construed to impeach the recommendation of the President to observe a thanksgiving in the next month. The situation of publick affairs at the respective periods was very different. Besides, in the mixed state of mercies and of judgments under the moral government of God, we frequently find reason both for thanksgiving and humiliation at the same time.

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DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE AND REASONABLENESS OF FASTING,

AND ON

The existing Causes that call us to that Duty.

Delivered at *PRINCETON*, on Tuesday the 6th January, 1795.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED

BY THE

SYNOD OF *NEW-YORK* AND *NEW-JERSEY*,

TO BE OBSERVED AS A GENERAL FAST,

By all the Churches of their Communion in those

States ; and now published

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUEST

OF THE

STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY AND LAW IN *PRINCETON*

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PHILADELPHIA :

PRINTED BY *WILLIAM YOUNG*, BOOKSELLER, No. 52, SECOND-
STREET, CORNER OF CHESNUT-STREET.

M,DCC,XCV.



J O E L, II. 12, 13.

THEREFORE also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning ; and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

THE divine judgments, when they immediately affect, or imminently threaten our country or ourselves, are calculated to impress the mind with humility and with veneration of the power and justice of God. They present to our view in the strong colours traced by fear, the guilt by which we have merited the correction of heaven ; and they constrain us by our sufferings to feel our weakness and dependence, which, in the elation of mind produced by prosperity, we are apt to forget. It is an impulse of nature, no less than a dictate of religion, when we are struck with affliction or are surrounded with danger, to have recourse by prayer to God who is the only refuge of the guilty and the weak. Repentance, supplication, submission, and a return to the spirit of duty and obedience, become a sinful and a suffering creature. It is in itself proper, and has been customary in all ages, to accompany these pious and inward dispositions of the heart with such decent outward expressions of hu-

mility and penitence as are calculated, by affecting the senses, to assist devotion, and to strengthen its principle. Among these, fasting has been the most frequent, and is, perhaps, the most natural. We find it always resorted to, in the history of the Jewish nation when they were actually suffering under great calamities, or were menaced with them by the denunciations of their prophets. It was when they were afflicted with a grievous famine, and at the same time were threatened with a dangerous war, that the prophet in the text called them *to fasting and weeping and mourning*.—During the Babylonish captivity, and even after their return to their own land, they observed, as a perpetual institution, the fasts of the fourth, the fifth, the seventh, and the tenth months in memory of their past sufferings, and of the sins by which they were incurred, in order that the recollection might forever preserve them from falling into the same evils.

THE vivacity of eastern sensibility, and the spirit of their religion, which consisted so much in outward rites and ceremonies, often led them to assume exterior marks of affliction which would be excessive under the christian dispensation, and especially in a climate like ours distinguished by a much more cool and temperate genius—They covered themselves with sackcloth—They cast ashes on their heads—They rent their garments.

THE christian church hath likewise her fast. *The days come*, saith Christ, speaking to the Jews of his disciples, *in which the bridegroom shall be taken*,

from them, after that shall they fast in those days.
 And the primitive christians frequently instituted fasts when their country was exposed to the calamities of war, of pestilence, or of famine, when the church was labouring under severe persecutions, or was menaced with them by her powerful enemies—when heresy or schism endangered her internal peace and order—or when general corruption of manners was likely to tarnish her purity and glory.

OUR church has thought that the circumstances of the present time, and the general aspect of divine providence, not only towards our own country, but towards the whole christian world, are such as to call for this duty from us.—The savage war that rages on our western frontier—The wars of Europe which in their sanguinary and exterminating spirit, so far exceed those of any former periods of her history, and which in their progress or their issue, may deeply involve the interests of these United States—The destructive insect that has repeatedly threatened desolation to our fields—the mortal and pestilential diseases that have lately visited this continent—and, above all, the growing degeneracy of our manners, and the progress of an open and licentious infidelity, call upon us in the language of the prophet, “Now, therefore, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning ; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God ; for he is gracious and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

IN this discourse I propose,

1. To point out the manner in which an acceptable fast to God ought to be celebrated.
2. To illustrate the reasonableness of this act of worship on occasions of public calamity or danger—and,
3. To explain the causes for which we are, at present, called to the duty.

THE nature—the reasonableness—and the present causes of fasting, will form the substance of the following discourse.

I. THE term implies an abstinence from our ordinary food. Under the ancient economy this was carried to a high degree of self-denial, and often to extreme austerity. When the government of Nineveh, at the denunciations of the prophet, proclaimed a fast, it was rigorously enjoined that all the people, and even the cattle should abstain both from food and from drink. “It was published throughout Nineveh by a decree of the king and his nobles—let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing : let them not feed nor drink water. Let man and beast be covered with sack-cloth.”* The extreme danger that hung over them called for deep humility from that guilty nation. And could any circumstances be more calculated to accomplish this end to affect the imagi-

* Jonah, iii. 7, 8.

nation, and impress the heart, than the blackness and mourning that covered all the land—than the vigorous abstinence that was enjoined—than the profound and universal silence that reigned, interrupted only by the prayers of a penitent people, or the cries of hunger uttered by the cattle in their empty stalls?

BUT, even under the Jewish institution, distinguished as it was by ceremony, the principal part of this duty consisted in the dispositions of the heart with which it was accompanied—in its humility—in its penitence and in acts of piety and benevolence.

THE prophet Isaiah, when he reproves the hypocrisy of the nation of Israel in discharging this duty, demands in the name of God—"is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thy own flesh?"* And the prophet Joel in the text requires sincere repentance, as the only principle that can give efficacy to the duty. "Turn ye even to me, saith the Lord, with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning—and rend your *heart* and not your garments."

THE inward and holy dispositions of the soul, indeed, are of more price in the sight of God, than any

* Isaiah, lviii. 6, 7.

rites that fatigue, or any austerities that only emaciate the body. "To what purpose, says St. Jerom, is that abstinence that subdues the flesh, if the soul is, at the same time inflated with pride? What is the merit of growing pale by the austerity of our fasts, if the countenance discovers, by its dark and lowering features, that we are inwardly gnawed by rancour or envy? What virtue is there in abstaining from wine, if we are intoxicated with malice and rage? Abstinence and mortification are then only to be esteemed virtues when by them the heart is purified from its vices and its sins." †

OUR blessed Lord, when he introduced the spiritual dispensation of the gospel, abrogated, among other ceremonies of the law, the rigors with which the Jewish fasts were observed. He told his disciples indeed that they must still fast when he should be taken from them, and they should be involved in those calamities by which he had destined, after his ascension, to try and to purify his church. "But when ye fast, saith he, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." ‡ Evidently our Saviour does not mean in this injunction to abrogate or to depreciate the duty, but only to require in it those graces

† Hieron ad Celantium.

‡ Matthew, vi. 16, 17, 18.

of the heart from which it ought to flow, and which it is calculated to strengthen and increase.

IF it is asked then what degree of abstinence is required in a christian fast? It is sufficient to answer that *the Lord will have mercy and not sacrifice*. It ought to be measured, by a conscientious man according to the habits of his health. That is the just degree that will best prepare us for the humble and penitent services of this day—That is equally remote from the fulness and indulgence of our ordinary living, and from that inanition and faintness that, in some feeble constitutions, would impede the exercises of a sincere and fervent devotion.

BUT it becomes a penitent christian to be chiefly employed in the recollection and confession of his sins—to bow in profound humility before the offended justice of God, to recognise its righteous inflictions, and to examine their causes and their end. And, as the end of every chastisement is to bring us to repentance and amendment of life, it becomes him, with a heart penetrated with a sense of his sins, to form, in the presence of God, the most sincere and steadfast purposes of duty, submission, and new obedience. “Then shall thy light break forth as
“the morning, and thy health shall spring forth
“speedily: thy righteousness shall go before thee,
“and the glory of the Lord shall be thy re-
“ward*.”

* Isaiah lviii. 8.

II. THE reasonableness of this duty is derived from various sources, which your time will permit me only cursorily to mention.

It is an expressive symbol of the penitence and affliction that should fill our hearts upon the recollection of our sins that have drawn upon us the righteous judgments of God, or have gathered round us the dark and threatening appearances of his just displeasure. By forcibly affecting the senses, it is calculated to make us feel our wants, and our dependence upon God, and to convince us that there is no protection for creatures so weak and so offending but in his power and favour. The solemnity of such an extraordinary act of religion, tends to make the mind serious and collected, and disposes it to enter deeply into the examination of our own hearts, and of the causes for which it hath pleased God to afflict us or to threaten us with his judgments. The passions, that have been inflamed by indulging appetite, are allayed by denying it. The strength of sin is weakened when its nourishment is taken away. Devotion is enlivened by freeing the body from a load that sometimes oppresses its exercises.

THE liveliness of a sensual imagination often checks the fervour, and impairs the purity of the worship of the heart—abstinence restrains it. Continual gratification tends to create a pride and elation of mind that is prone to forget its dependent and accountable state—Abstinence mortifies it. Abstinence serves, therefore, to cherish those sentiments of purity, of

spirituality, of self-denial, of profound humility, and sincere repentance which become us on this day. St. Augustin expresses the excellence of this duty in the following language: "Fasting, saith he, purifies the soul, it elevates us above the grosser objects of sense, it subdues the flesh, and contributes to form a heart humble and contrite. It dissipates the darkness with which concupiscence covers the mind, it extinguishes the flame of impurity, and rekindles the fire of divine love. It moderates our desires, it mortifies our passions, and sets bounds to lust. By fasting, the people of Nineveh arrested, as it were, the just indignation of God—by the same duty, the children of Israel, humbling their souls before him, found deliverance from all the evils that afflicted them. It was by this holy exercise that Elias was rapt to heaven in a chariot of fire—that Moses was qualified to receive the law from God—and that even the son of God prepared himself to preach the gospel. Not that he had any need of these abstemious duties, but that he might leave us so salutary and holy an example."

THE command of God to fast and pray, the promises he has made to his people in the faithful discharge of this duty, and the numerous examples of their gracious accomplishment in the history of Israel, are all encouragements to a sincere and faithful worshipper to hope for a merciful answer to his reasonable, his fervent, and persevering prayers. The influence of this duty in humbling and sanctifying the heart, and in enlivening its devotions will probably not be denied. But we have reason also from the tenour of scripture, to believe, and without destroying

the obligations of human industry, and the necessary agency of natural causes, we may rationally admit that it has an influence likewise on the course of the world, and a powerful effect in procuring many other blessings besides those that are internal and spiritual only.

OBJECTIONS indeed, which may mislead such as have not deeply and seriously examined the subject, have been raised against this doctrine by the spirit of an infidel philosophy. A short review of these will contribute to confirm a truth that is connected, in its principles, with so many other duties of the christian life. All things, say a part of these philosophers, are governed by the laws of an irresistible *fatality*, or are left, without law, to the impulse of a capricious *chance*. If there be a God, say others, who has created, and who superintends the order of nature, this order must proceed in an unchangeable train of causes and effects which cannot be moved by the supplications of mortals. Infinite wisdom must be as invariable in its ideas and plans as absolute and unintelligent *fate*. All devotion, according to them, is enthusiasm, and prayer is only the resource of weak minds who think, by their feeble breath, to change the eternal course of the universe. These are the objections—With regard to the former, I shall only say that the principles of fatality and chance are the lazy refuge of minds too indolent to think, or the gloomy suggestions of a deplorable atheism which can have few disciples in a country like this, whose morals are, as yet, so far removed from the extreme of corruption. They do not merit a refu-

tation. The objection drawn from the constancy of nature is better founded—Christians, no less than these philosophers, believe that the progress and dependence of causes and effects throughout the universe, are as invariable as the ideas of infinite wisdom, by which they were originally fixed: But, as the principle acknowledges a Deity who is the creator and ruler of the world, it does not militate against the efficacy of prayer. Could not he, whose intelligence contemplated at one view the whole chain of events from the beginning to the end of time, and whose power imparted to all natural causes their energies and connexions, so perfectly harmonize the physical and moral worlds, that the results of the one should always correspond with those of the other, according to the system he designed to establish? The perfections of God lead us to expect, what the course of nature indicates, the existence of a moral government in the universe. “Affliction cometh not forth
 “of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of
 “the ground.”* Can philosophy then deny to the christian, the hopes which he derives from the word and promises of God? May not God in his eternal prescience of the penitence and submission of his people, under the corrections of his providence, have so arranged the train of causes from the beginning, as, at the proper moment, to answer their prayers, and reward their returning virtues, without disturbing the established order of nature?†

* Job, vi. 6.

† This conclusion is so fairly drawn, that infidelity cannot deny it, unless it will return back to that absurd philosophy that

BESIDES, if fasting and prayer contribute to the improvement of the heart, and the amendment of the life—and if virtue has an acknowledged influence on national and individual prosperity, are not these duties as much prescribed by a sound and honest reason, as by the laws of religion? May they not even be ranked among those natural causes of success and happiness, which God has established in the system of the world, and on which the objector presumes to deny their efficacy?

WILL you, then, proud and ignorant pretender to reason! retort with a sneer on the pious man, who attributes all the evils which afflict him to the righteous providence of God, that they are only natural events? Is not *nature* under the direction of the supreme and moral ruler of the universe? Will you cast a contemptuous look on the penitent and humble soul, who, in his affliction, supplicates the throne of grace, as if he were pursuing merely the visionary ideas of a weak enthusiasm? Will you rob him of the consolation of pouring his sorrows into the bosom of his heavenly Father? Will you tear from him the support of those hopes which he derives from the divine goodness and mercy? Will you tell him to abandon his prayers, to renounce his religion, to expect relief only from the blind or accidental course of events?—Oh! miserable philosophy! Are not all events under the controul of a wise and gracious pow-

maintained the eternity of the world, and the inherent perverseness of matter, which could not be perfectly reduced to order, even by divine omnipotence or wisdom.

er? Do they not all compose one universal system of moral discipline, arranged among other purposes, with relation to the penitence and the prayers of the pious?

HAVING thus, with the greatest simplicity, explained the nature and reasonableness of our present duty, both for the instruction of the serious hearer, and for the conviction of pretenders to a profane philosophy, I proceed,

III. To point out and illustrate the causes which, on this day, call us to fasting and prayer.

WHEN we attempt to enumerate these causes, it is more difficult to arrange them, than to find abundant materials in our sins, in the inflictions of Heaven, and in the circumstances of danger that still surround us, for humiliation and repentance. They are such, however, as ought to mingle our praises with our tears, because God has afflicted us more lightly than we deserved. Often, he has only shaken his rod, as it were, over our heads, and has suspended the stroke, waiting for our duty and submission. His thunders if I may use that language, have rolled only at a distance, that our repentance might disperse the gathering storm, before it was collected to break upon us. In some instances he has touched us in our persons, in our families, in our fields, and in our country; but, hitherto, it has been with a gentle hand. He has for a moment, surprised us with the view of his power, and his justice; and again, in a moment, he has re-

turned to the exercise of that *mercy* in which he *delighteth*, that the mingled emotions of love and fear, might attach us as with a double cord, to his service.

I. SHALL I mention, in the first place, those diseases of uncommon contagion and mortality which have afflicted different parts of the continent? Can we have forgotten the calamity which lately ravaged a neighbouring city, which filled every house with lamentation, and mourning, which covered every face with paleness and consternation, and spread its terrors to the extremities of the Union? * Have we forgotten the anguish which *we* felt, both thro' sympathy with the distressed, and thro' apprehension for ourselves? That terrible disease was, in more than one instance, brought to our own doors; † but heaven, in its mysterious mercy, spared us, while it poured the cup of affliction into their bosoms. Different cities and villages have since that period, been visited by a similar pestilence; and many more have suffered an unusual mortality from other diseases. ‡ Into our own houses the arrows of death have been shot; and the badges of mourning that I see before me, call to my mind a husband, or a wife, a parent, or a child, a brother,

* The Yellow fever in the city of Philadelphia.

† Three persons from the city died in Princeton and its neighbourhood without communicating the infection to any others.

‡ Particularly Charleston, Baltimore, Harrisburg, and New-Haven, and a great number of other places of less note in the States of Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

or a sister, recently torn from our affectionate embrace.† These chastisements, or these warnings, speak to us with a divine voice. They are gracious admonitions of the justice of God, which, if we refuse to hear, he may fix the arrow next in our own breasts. This day, let us, by unfeigned repentance and humiliation, implore his mercy to avert his threatened judgments, or to remove those actual griefs, which each of us may experience in his own private lot. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ?*

2. IN the next place has he not, in order to shew us how weak we are in his hands, and to annihilate us, as it were, before the majesty of his justice, chosen the most feeble of all instruments to chastise an ungrateful people ? An insect, almost invisible, has cut off our fields, and mocked the hopes of the husbandman.‡ How often has this feeble army mowed them as bare as if they had been consumed by fire from Heaven ? It is true, the poor have still had bread to eat. The indulgence of an offended God has not yet afflicted us with the miseries of famine. He has gently corrected us for that criminal ingratitude with

† More instances of mortality have happened in Princeton, within fifteen months, than had been known before for many years. Among others, the author lost a child, and his wife a parent.

‡ An insect generally known by the name of the *Hessian Fly*, has committed great ravages in New-Jersey, and has produced a real and distressing scarcity of the fruits of the earth.

which we abused his bounty, and forgot the giver of all our good. But he has, at the same time, taught us what we may justly fear, when he comes in righteousness to *force* a repentance which neither the evidences of his love, nor the milder corrections of his providence, could *draw* from a thoughtless generation devoted to their pleasures. What the insect may spare the drought may destroy. See in the animated and strong description of the prophet Joel, how dreadful a scourge the most contemptible reptiles, united with a defect of the dews of heaven, may be made to a guilty land. “That which the palmer worm hath left hath the locust eaten—and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten—and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten. The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new vine is dried up; the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen! Howl O ye vine-dressers! For the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes? Yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Lord! To thee will I cry; for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.”* What a picture of misery and distress! When the justice of divine providence commands it, the feeblest of all creatures may be made to lay waste a whole kingdom, and carry

* Joel i. 4, 10, 14, 15.

desolation into every house. Man and beast perish by thousands, in dumb and silent anguish, or amidst the cries of a frightful despair which may reach heaven indeed, but which human sympathy can only weep over and pity.

THE prophet called that sinful but afflicted people to fast, and to *cry to the Lord*, that he might remove the scourge of that desolating famine under which they groaned. Happy shall *we* be if we can anticipate the evil—if, by sincere repentance, we can arrest it in the beginning—and if he, instead of cutting off the produce of our fields, will continue to give us, along with grateful hearts to improve the mercy, both food to eat, and raiment to put on.

3. ANOTHER cause that calls us to humiliation and repentance, is the war that has so long afflicted our frontiers, in which we are concerned as brethren, and that which rages in Europe, in which we are concerned by political connexions.

WAR is, perhaps, the most cruel and destructive of all plagues. Heavier impositions oppress the people to support its enormous expenses—greater distress marks the track of hostile armies—and greater numbers perish by the sword than by all other calamities. We look with horror on the ravages of the pestilence. But, what are these to the heaps of slain, the mangled bodies, the groaning hospitals, the conflagrations, the pillage, the brutal violation of chastity, the widows, the orphans, the nameless miseries that follow in the train of war? How often have our bre-

thren, during four years, experienced all its accumulated evils from a savage and ferocious enemy ! How many may at this moment, be perishing under the murderous hatchet ! How many at this moment, may have their souls pierced by the terrifying yells of savages thirsting for blood, with a horror worse than the death which, the next moment, awaits them ! How many may be dragged to cruel and hopeless captivity ! How many infants may be dashed to pieces against the next rock or the next tree ! How many matrons and virgins may be piercing the dismal silence of the wilderness with their unavailing shrieks ! How many men may be expiring under all those dreadful tortures which savage cruelty and ingenuity know so well how to increase and protract ! Are these evils nothing to us, because we are placed at a distance from the scenes ? No, *they* are our fellow-citizens ; and every calamity which falls upon *them*, must affect *us* by our sympathy, as well as by our political union with the sufferers ? Wherever the stroke of divine providence falls, it is intended for the chastisement of the nation. If we are insensible and impenitent under this correction, may he not bring the affliction home to ourselves by our relations with Europe ? You see the old world torn from its foundations by a spirit of revolution. Convulsed, as with an universal earthquake, all its thrones totter—all its nations are dashed against one another—the blood of its inhabitants flows in rivers. It seems as if heaven, having destined some new and astonishing order of things to take place, were about to sweep the present generation from the earth with the besom of its wrath,

as it did the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, that a new race might arise better fitted to fulfil its mysterious purposes. Can America remain wholly unaffected in the catastrophe of the contending nations! Thro' the pride and violence of one, and thro' the daring and insidious artifices of the ministry of another, she has already but narrowly escaped being dragged into the vortex of their wars. And her political and commercial relations to them, still place her in a situation of imminent danger. By the goodness of divine providence, and by the wisdom and firmness of government, we have hitherto been preserved from this fatal event. But it is only by repentance and reformation that we can certainly hope to avert this as well as every other calamity with which a just and holy God may afflict an impenitent and sinful nation. For this purpose we are now assembled. And let me say to you in the language of the king of Nineveh to his people, "cry mightily unto God, and turn you every one from his evil way. Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not!"*

SHALL I add under this head, to the evils which we have to deprecate, or to deplore, the flames of discord and sedition lighted up by faction, discontent, or popular ambition working upon ignorance. An insurrection, indeed, that lately wore a dangerous appearance, has been happily quelled under that peculiar felicity of conduct that always marks the measures

* Jonah iii. 8, 9.

of our chief magistrate. But, while we offer our thanks to God for the restoration of the publick tranquillity, this event serves to strengthen the reason for our present duty. It serves to be sincerely deplored, that the state contains so many men, citizens I will not call them, who can wantonly trifle with the blessings of peace, and order, and who, for the wretched purposes of party, or for the shameful license of intoxication, are willing to throw the whole nation into the wildest tumult and confusion. Although we are, at present, rescued, by the timely and judicious exertion of the power of the union, from the danger that menaced us, yet it serves to demonstrate how easily a righteous providence may punish an impenitent and ungrateful people by the calamities of civil discord. Our republick is composed of states of various interests, manners, and ideas. Jealousies, suspicions, rivalships, naturally spring out of so many distinct sovereignties, and such different local situations. Marked parties already exist in the government. A certain *fever* and *delirium* of *liberty*—perhaps, from the aspect it has put on in some places, I might call it by a harsher name, as it is at war with all decency and subordination, has invaded part of the people. We are a mass of inflammable materials pressed together, for the present, by the force of external danger which confines the fire that is already working within. If once this pressure be removed, or we are placed, by feeling our own strength, beyond the apprehensions of foreign violence and injustice, is there not reason to fear, that, without the peculiar guardianship and care of a gracious providence, turbulent spirits violently agitating the whole mass, the flame

will take vent, and the imprisoned volcano broken loose, will rend asunder the sides of the mountain which contains it, or, with infinite fury, tear and disgorge its own entrails! Merciful God! save us from this calamity! Thou art our only sure resource! It is only by piety to thee, as the basis of the public virtue and morals, that we can reasonably hope to escape these dreadful effects of thy just displeasure! Let us begin, my brethren, the course of reformation by the confession of our sins, and by sincere repentance, that *God may delight to dwell among us*, and preserve to us that happy union, and that inestimable peace at home which will be the crown and perfection of all our other blessings.

4. ANOTHER reason for which we are, this day, called to fasting and humiliation, is the prevalence of immorality and vice, and especially of the principles of a bold and licentious infidelity.

JEREMIAH pronounces from God this alarming oracle to the nation of Israel, “I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord.”* And the prophet Amos—“you only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.”† This is the righteous rule by which he directs the operations of his providence towards all nations, and particularly towards those who have enjoyed and abused singular blessings, or singular means of knowledge and of grace. If

* Jer. xxi. 14.

† Amos, iii, 2.

mercies, or privileges can aggravate offence, how criminal must be the people of these states if they forget the God who has broken the yoke of servitude from their necks—who has humbled before them the pride and insolence of their enemies—and who has established them in a state of public security, of individual independence, and of general but simple plenty, which scarcely any other nation on earth enjoys? How much more criminal must they be if they despise the gospel of Christ which they have had the peculiar felicity to receive in its purity and simplicity, untainted by the corruptions, and unshackled by the restraints of civil, or ecclesiastical despotism?—Yet, if we review our manners and our principles, how much reason do we find in them for repentance?—Is not God blasphemed by the common and irreverent use of his holy name, and still more by those impious execrations that are employed to vent the rage and fury of the passions? Are not his Sabbaths profaned by applying them, not to his worship, but to our own business or amusement? How are his temples forsaken that were once crowded with such religious respect? How are his ordinances condemned by multitudes who only have recourse to them as a last but alas! a mistaken refuge, in extreme affliction? Where are the families that acknowledge him altho' he has threatened to *pour out his wrath on the families that call not on his name*? Pagans offered their incense, and poured their daily libations to their household Gods, while christians, to their shame, neglect to adore that God in whom they live and move, and have their being, who surrounds their habitations with peace and security, and crowns their domestic

lot with innumerable comforts. These sins are of the greater importance, and deserve the more to be called to mind for our humiliation, because a principle of religion and duty to God, lies at the foundation of all sincere and genuine morality, both public and private. When his fear is despised, and his worship is abandoned, vice and licentiousness of manners speedily ensue, that bring down the judgments of Heaven on a land.

WHEN we descend to those sins that affect solely ourselves, or our fellow-men, it is difficult to know where to close the catalogue, and almost impossible to draw in too high colours the picture of our guilt. How many examples have we to deplore of idleness, the parent of a thousand other vices? Of hard and cruel selfishness, insensible to the claims of human nature, and regardless of the rights and feelings of others? How many examples of injustice, of falsehood, of fraud! What intemperance! What loose and criminal pleasures! What malice! What envy! What slander! Above all, what political slander, that, in order, to serve the purposes of ambition or of party, seems willing to impose upon itself no restraints of truth or of decency! It dignifies itself with the pretences of *patriotism*, and *the love of the people*, and, under these respectable masks, which vice and knavery are often most forward to assume, believes it may commit robbery and murder with impunity. But, were I to enumerate all our vices in detail, I should fatigue your patience, and waste the day. I should be obliged to develop all the criminal principles and stratagems of the human heart, and to re-

trace the whole of that guilty history that is daily acted on the theatre of the world.

WITHOUT confining our view to these open and flagrant crimes, let every christian seriously re-examine his own heart. Is it not as true now, as it has been in every age, that *because iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold*? Has not the general impiety and corruption spread its infection to you? Instead of awakening your repentance, and re-animating your zeal, as it ought, has it not gone far to extinguish in your hearts that sacred and ardent flame of *love to God and man*, that is the vivifying principle of every christian duty? How little concern do we see to edify the world, and to adorn *the profession of God our Saviour* by a pious and holy example? What an unfavourable prospect arises to the church from our growing remissness in training the rising generation in the knowledge and the fear of God? Do we not, in one word, observe among the professors of the gospel a coldness of spirit, and a degeneracy of manners, dishonourable to Christ, and infinitely reproachful to the christian name? Let each of us look into himself, he will there find a picture of the general corruption. Ah! blessed Lord! thou hast been *wounded in the house of thy friends*, therefore thine enemies insult thy cross!—Christians awake from this criminal and shameful lethargy of soul! Be penetrated with a lively grief for the unworthy requital you have made, and the dishonours you have done to the riches of divine grace and love by which you have been saved! With *you* then let the public reformation

begin, *that others also seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven !*

ADDED to all our other sins, have we not to deplore in this pretended *age of reason*,* the progress of a bold and licentious infidelity that is at war with all reason, morals, and religion—whose God is nature, whose apostles are profligates, whose faith is the innocence of criminal pleasures, and whose law of duty is the impulse of passion. An age of reason ! It is an age of luxury, of dissipation, of relaxed morals, of superficial inquiry. Its vices have made it desirous of tearing away the restraints of religion. Pained by the light of divine truth, it has endeavoured to replunge itself into the darkness of ancient paganism. It has hated the rigid law of revealed duty, it has

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* There is evidently a reference in this expression to a pamphlet that has appeared under the same title. But as that pamphlet is chiefly remarkable for ignorance and audacity, it would not have deserved this notice, if it had not become a kind of cant to boast of the superior illumination of the present above every preceding age. But there is a reference chiefly to certain atheistical opinions which not long since agitated and disgraced the French convention, and have been re-echoed by some weak people in America who adopt their infidelity like certain fashions, merely because *it is supposed* to be *French*. As that spirit however, which was likely to do so much injury to the affairs of France, has received a check, perhaps, our own countrymen may begin to think there is *less reason* in it. If any reader should remark that the principles of infidelity are only *declaimed* against in the discourse ; it is sufficient to reply that this was not the place to *reason* upon them. Our publick sins are recounted for our humiliation. It is to be supposed that a christian audience would acknowledge them to be sins. And therefore to produce the designed effect, their *enormity* only requires to be painted.

feared the destiny of sin in a future world, and in order to rid itself of the objects of its hatred and its fears, it has been willing to extinguish the blessed hopes of immortality—It has written on the repositories of the dead, as its best consolation “ death is an eternal sleep”—Or, it has suffered a delirious imagination to wander with the philosophers of antiquity, thro’ an uncertain limbus of souls where there are no bounds to conjecture, and to error. An age of reason! It is not an enlightened reason, but a corrupted heart, that has refused to be guided by the lights of the gospel.

BLESSED JESUS ! Thy gracious and heavenly mission has been rejected by blinded mortals who have no guide to certainty and truth but thee ! Thy divine nature, and thy supreme dominion have been insulted by worms of the dust who have dared to rise in rebellion against thee !—Thy sole and meritorious atonement has been denied by miserable sinners who have no hope in eternity but thee !—My brethren ! Shall not God punish by his righteous judgments, if he cannot bring to repentance, a *guilty age* which has impiously endeavoured to drag the *Sun of Righteousness* from his sphere—which has insulted his glory, and blasphemed the astonishing stoops of his mercy ? Every sincere believer in Jesus Christ must be deeply penetrated with these dishonors done to his Redeemer’s name. And he will find, in these daring impieties, in the general voice that surrounds him, and in his own heart, the subjects of profound repentance and contrition before God. Arrest, O Lord ! the growing profanity of the age ! When will the ini-

quities of men come to an end, and the reign of truth and righteousness be extended from the rising to the setting sun !

WHAT, then my brethren is our duty on this day ? Is it not to humble our souls before God under his corrections ? Is it not to make confession of our sins, and to turn from them with all our heart to the living and true God ? Let us fervently address our prayers to the throne of his grace, that he would protect and bless our country—that he would endue with that wisdom which is from above, our legislators, our magistrates, and our judges—that he would promote the means of general knowledge, and extend the influence of true religion as the surest basis of the public weal—that he would teach us with sobriety, temperance, and thankfulness of heart, to enjoy the blessings of his providence, assured that, if we do not glorify him in the use of his mercies, he will glorify himself in the execution of his judgments. Let us, finally, implore from his mercy that he would spare the blood of our brethren shed by cruel and ferocious hands—that he would allay the convulsions that agitate the christian world—and that he, who has all events, and the hearts of all men in his hands, would bring from the bosom of that chaos, a new creation of liberty and peace, and true religion over the whole earth—A M E N.

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AND
24 JUL 68
FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT;

WITH

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

AND

A SHORT COMMENTARY EXTRACTED

FROM A GREATER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

TRANSLATED BY THE REV. PHILIP LEFANU, D. D.

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